



The Credibility Process

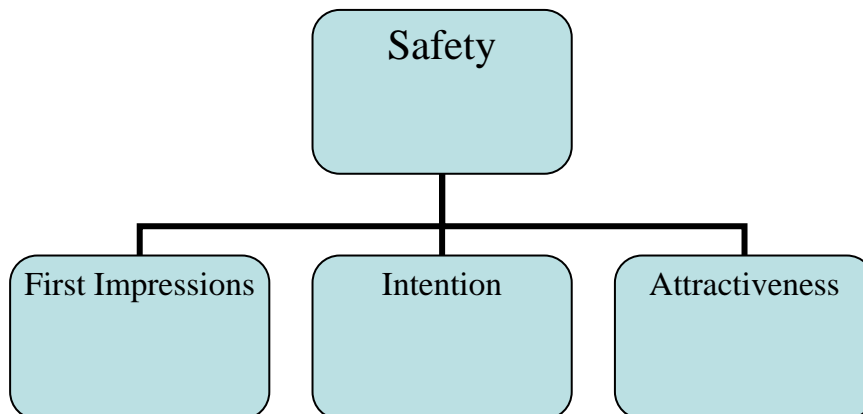
Michael Lovas, C.Ht

Credibility is the result of a scientific process – not an event. And, once you attain Credibility with someone, you open the possibility of having a highly rewarding client relationship, one that will bring you referrals. And, in case you had not figured this out, Credibility is not necessarily its own reward. The business payoff from building your Credibility is a significantly more “productive” client relationships. That’s the real payoff, because those more “productive” relationships result in referrals and more new business.

In order to achieve that goal, you have to learn the steps of the Credibility Process, then strategically put each one into action by using specific psychological tools and skills. The more you know about the process, the better prepared you will be to create opportunities to improve your Credibility. With each step, you increase your Credibility a little more. There are really two Giant Steps in the process: likeability and credibility. If your business is based on relationships, then you most likely cannot get to credibility until you have achieved likeability.

We’ve identified the following major steps in the process and put them into a schematic. In mid-October of 2009, I reformatted the schematic to make it more easily understood. So, I’ll present each step here independently:

STEP ONE - Safety:



Much of Step One (Safety) takes place in the prospect's subconscious mind. And, while it is more difficult for you to have a direct affect on it, it's nonetheless vital. To succeed with Safety, you need to make sure your first impression is positive; that your intentions are ethical (people can generally tell); and do everything you can to make yourself appear attractive. In our book *Axis of Influence*, we go into detail about the attractiveness factor and explain what it is (scientifically) and how you can improve your own attractiveness. In the meantime, here is some guidance for you.

The Attractiveness Factor.

For people who are single, attractiveness is the big puzzle, right? A twenty-something in the dating world might approach attractiveness through certain clothing, make-up and pheromone therapy. For business people, it's the same thing. Simply determine what you need to do to appear as attractive as possible – in the most appropriate way. You might do this:

1. Rearrange your office to take advantage of the available natural light, making it shine on you, rather than blast from behind you.
2. Buy good china and/or crystal to serve your coffee and Cokes in.
3. Talk with a color consultant to find the colors that make you look the best, and the ones to avoid at all costs. Political debates are excellent examples of people wearing colors that make them look good. Ever see a candidate wearing a brown suit?
4. Get a manicure and shine your shoes.
5. Buy two or three high-end or custom-made suits that make you look world-class. You want to look as though you really do deserve high-net-worth business.
6. Go to a really good hair salon/colorist to get help shaping your hair (and beard). Many of us are still wearing our hair the same way we did when we were young. Not only do styles change, but so does the quantity of our hair. Please, no “comb-overs.” They make that person look like he's in denial about who he has become.
7. Train your assistant or office manager to read your prospects and build rapport with them.

Insight: Why are those things important? Consider it damage control. It keeps the prospect from forming the conclusion that you overlook details, or that you are careless. Who wants to place their trust in someone who doesn't appreciate details?

Build a "halo." When you take care of those details, and go through the effort to make yourself look your best to your prospects and clients, a wee bit of magic happens. It's called the “halo effect.” This is a psychological phenomenon also known as “cognitive bias.” In other words, when you succeed in making yourself safe, likable and attractive, you initiate a perceptual chain reaction, whereby the prospect infers or ascribes more and more attributes on you.

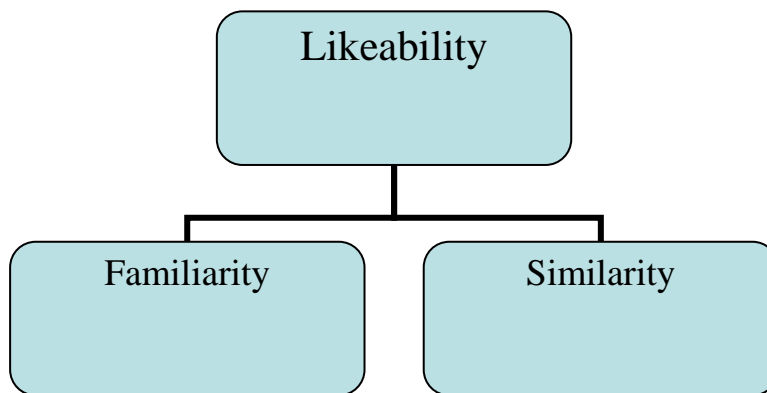
Some of the pivotal research on the halo effect was conducted by Edward Thorndike. He surveyed military officers by asking them to rate their soldiers. Thorndike discovered that people tend to see others as roughly good or roughly bad, across all categories of

measurement. What they don't do is look objectively at someone, "Oh, I give him a 37% on details, 23% on strategic thinking, 10% on credentials and..." Instead, they lump qualities together to come up with an average. "Mike? Yes, he's a good guy."

It works like this: the first trait we recognize in another person influences our interpretation and perception of latter ones. Consider the following perceptions. (Obviously, there is little basis in fact, but the perceptions are real):

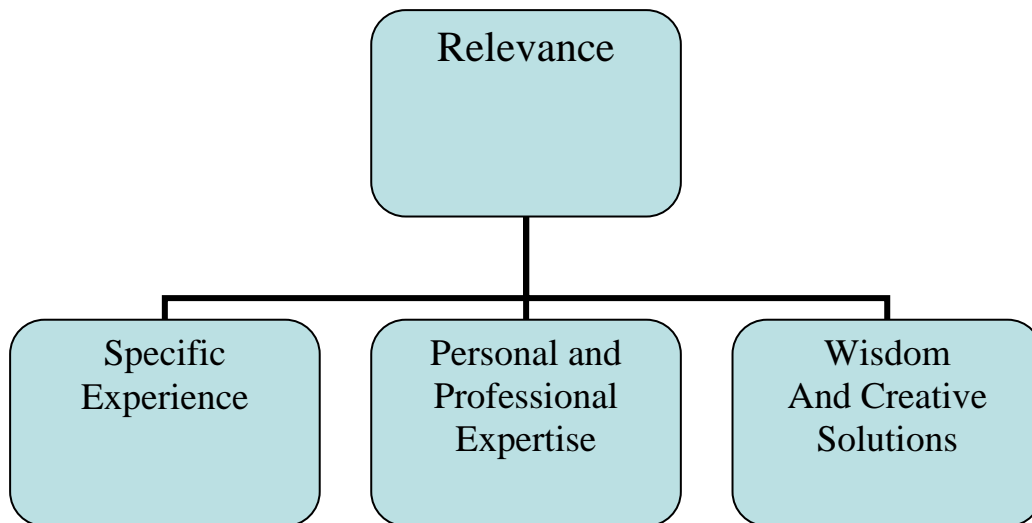
- Attractive people are often judged as having a more desirable personality.
- Attractive people are also judged to have more skills than someone of average appearance.
- Polite and attentive people are seen as trustworthy.
- Quiet people are seen as timid.
- Strong minded people can be seen as obstinate.
- Overweight people are seen as stupid.

STEP TWO - Likeability:



Step two is the point at which you have the most impact on how the other person perceives you. And, let there be no misunderstanding – your Credibility is entirely in the hands of (mind of) the other person(s). You are at the mercy of his or her perceptions of you. However, you have significant control over those perceptions. In my experience, this is the point at which many professionals drop the ball.

There are two primary ways to generate interest – 1) show yourself as relevant and 2) make yourself more attractive. Most people have one or the other, but not both. Most people can make themselves attractive, but few people can show themselves as relevant. Recognize the power of having them both work for you. Let's look at them.



STEP THREE – Relevance:

The Relevance Factor.

Let's assume you are talking with a new prospect. He is smiling and nodding, so you know he's feeling safe with you. Now, what will be the topic(s) of your conversation? What questions are you going to ask?

If you don't take time to discover what that person wants to accomplish, if you don't ask insightful questions, then you'll most likely talk about what you want to sell. If your products and services are not in the bull's eye for that client, you're working your way into a hole.

This is the problem many consumers have with firms that sell only one product or one service. Those firms seek to make the prospect relevant to their product, rather than make themselves relevant to the prospect's problem. Until you can prove your relevance, you can't go any farther in the Credibility Process. This is where Social Media Marketing becomes vital to your success. It allows the universe of prospects to tell you what's relevant to them.

Attend to details. Remember that real Credibility is something which is developed over time and must be a priority in everything you do. Unless you approach it in a systematic way, you'll forget about it and go back to how you used to do things. Think of launching a Credibility Strategy that would give you opportunities to:

- Build rapport and a personal connection.
- Prove your relevance as soon as possible
- Show that you really understand the prospect's situation
- Demonstrate your listening skills

- Ask great questions
- Follow through on promises
- Be proactive and show that you genuinely care for that person

In Conclusion. The study of professional Credibility is a combination of many disciplines: psychology, sociology, anthropology, personal development, and political science. The amount of research is growing, but rarely ever do the subjects and titles relate to Credibility. In other words, it is neither simple nor easy to find appropriate research related to professional Credibility. We've found it because we've spent nearly twenty years looking for it (since 1991).

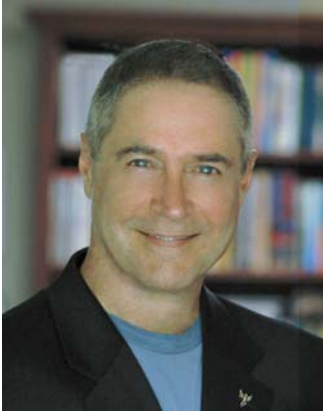
Now you've had a tiny peek inside the Credibility Process. Knowing which steps to focus on can help you improve your own Credibility and take your business up a significant leap. Follow the process as you would a road map through a foreign country. And, when you need help to determine what actions to take, or how to implement, just give us a call.

If you have not read *Axis of Influence*, it is our book that goes into detail, teaching you exactly how to build your Credibility and make yourself more Likeable. It also presents you with much of the research to substantiate the advice we give in the book! *Axis of Influence* is available from our website: <http://www.aboutpeople.com>

Your Reward.

How well does your marketing work for you? How well does it represent you? Does it establish you as a credible professional or something else? If you want to get our objective review and analysis of your marketing, just let me know. (Time permitting) I will personally perform a psychological review – a psycho analysis of one marketing piece (one page) for free. Aren't Rewards fun?

-- Michael Lovas



MICHAEL LOVAS is the author of twelve books, three columns, and a thousand articles on Professional Credibility and the Psychology of Communication. He's the co-founder of AboutPeople and the founder of Credibility Marketing.

Michael's background and education focus on using psychology in business communication to be significantly more effective and successful. These include: online and offline marketing, social media marketing, group presentations and selling.

AboutPeople Books:

1. ***(NEW) The Credibility Advantage!*** Strategies and Tools for Increasing Business Results
2. ***(NEW) Axis of Influence!*** How Credibility & Likeability Intersect to Drive Success!
3. ***(NEW) Words that Sell*** – The Language of Psychological Marketing & Selling
4. ***Face Values*** – How to Read People and connect with them in less than 3 minutes!
5. ***The Boomer Handbook*** – The financial advisor's guide to understanding the Boomer mind
6. ***Presentation Magic*** - How to gain a psychological advantage in your seminars and sales presentations
7. ***The 5 Levels of Rapport*** – How to create a meaningful connection with people who are important to you
8. ***Magnetic Connections*** – Consultative Selling for Financial Professionals
9. ***IDENTITY*** – How to create and deliver the most important statement of your business life
10. ***Questions Are the Answer***
11. ***Inside the Mind of the Senior Market***
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